DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 118 090 IR 002 991

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TITLE Pragmatic Proposals for Professional Pedagogy in Education for Broadcasting.
PUB DATE 16 Nov 75
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (Washington, D.C., November 16, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Broadcast Industry; Curriculum Development; Educational Background; Higher Education; Job Skills; News Reporting; *Professional Education; Radio; *Technical Education; Telecommunication; Television
IDENTIFIERS Broadcasters; NAEB 75

ABSTRACT

Education designed to prepare future broadcasters should begin to concentrate on liberal arts and professionalism and should de-emphasize skills and technical competencies. Two weaknesses of a technical-centered education are: (1) that technical competencies rapidly become obsolete, and (2) that the broadcaster trained as a technician usually lacks the background and sensitivity to turn the industry away from commercialism and towards meeting the needs of the society. Broadcasters should be educated to make intelligent decisions and to use the media to promote a free and harmonious society. This goal is best achieved through a general, liberal arts education, and through exposure to senior broadcasters who have a broad and humane perspective on the world. (EMH)

PRAGMATIC PROPOSALS FOR PROFESSIONAL PEDAGOGY IN EDUCATION FOR BROADCASTING

by

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Paper Delivered At NAEB
Convention
Washington, D.C.
November 16, 1975

As amicus curiae I present the case for a liberal education coupled with professional, (as distinguished from skills and techniques), preparation for positions in the broadcasting industry.

What we have to judge here is not a simple trial of a plaintiff versus a defendant. The dispute over education for broadcasting cannot be reduced to an either-or proposition -- a choice between technical, skills-oriented training and the "indirect approach", which tends to eliminate broadcasting courses altogether. Maurice Shelby, for example, seems to consider Television and Radio as Social and Behavioral Sciences.[1]

Nor can we take refuge in a simplistic compromise combining the two positions into a both-and solution wherein a shotgun marriage between the two is effected. Unfortunately, at least my own experience and that of colleagues holding dual roles as both professors and radio-TV practitioners indicate that the progeny of such a mating tend to be either stillborn, deformed or, if emerging somewhat whole, they live to cuss out their alma mater and disavow their parentage. While such a hybrid education-training appears to do a quite adequate job of preparing students for entry occupations in broadcasting, it does not tend to provide them with the knowledge and understanding of principles necessary for advancement to positions on the higher, more responsible levels in our medium.

If such an indictment can be justifiably leveled against the combination techniques-plus-liberal arts approach, how much more fairly can it be centered against the concentration on techniques itself! Besides, any university or college deserving of its status is inclined to consider the techniques program unworthy of consideration.

An April 26, 1975 Billboard magazine article, cited by Avery in his summer 1975 Public Communications Review piece on Broadcast Education[2] reports that

recent graduates of college courses in broadcasting label them as "totally ineffective except for those portions of courses that are taught by 'disk jockeys, program directors, salesmen, and managers (who) constantly do guest stints for college radio courses.'" Their verdict: "College professors exist in some radio vacuum tube that blew out years ago."

Avery seems reassured by the finding that the perspectives of students change as they move from the role of graduating seniors into the industry itself. As seniors, they rate their college education as an aid or hindrance to finding a job. "But as the years pass, there are indications that students develop a broader understanding of what was attempted on their behalf."[3] That would seem to suggest that the worth of theory courses and liberal arts courses, providing a broadening outlook, becomes clearer as broadcasting alumni climb the rungs of the ladder to professional positions where perspectives and insights, beyond what "hands-on" courses provide, are needed.

Perhaps that accusation that "College professors exist in some radio vacuum tube that blew out years ago" is not entirely gratuitous. Ben Bagdikian[4] cites some 25 futurists, all internationally recognized authorities in their areas of expertise, to the effect that the electronic media are so rapidly changing their operations and society itself that we seem to be undergoing a revolution in communications technology and its effects on us all. One conclusion of these futurists, weighted with implications crucial for us, is that practitioners in the field are finding themselves, of necessity, continuously "retooled" on their jobs.

Continuously improved and increasingly complex equipment appears on the market each year. Anyone wandering through the equipment displays at our NAEB conventions would have to be blind and deaf to miss the astounding rapidity with which manufacturers are inundating the industry with new goodies for their delight and dollars.

Broadcasters find themselves hard put to adapt to the possibilities of automated audio recording, playback and editing equipment; improved cameras, television switchers, videotape recorders, CMX editors and computer graphics units that can do almost everything but reproduce themselves; automatic logging, scheduling, accounting, billing and availability-indicating machines -- plus the myriad of other sophisticated novel devices of broadcast production. If the practitioners in the field are hard put to keep up with technical advances creatively, imaginatively and productively, how much more difficult is it for us who purport to teach a professional, content-founded and not just "effects happy" use of these goodies?

The writer presumes to testify from the perspective of one enabled by his employers to maintain a foothold in the broadcasting industry almost without interruption during his years of college-level teaching. From 1953 to 1966 he was supervising director of a commercial TV station and, since 1967, has been producer-director of weekly half-hour and hour-long programs over the superbly equipped and staffed South Carolina ETV network. He also maintains constant liaison with commercial broadcasting via opportunity to sit in on the monthly meetings of the board of directors of the state broadcasting association. The headquarters of SCBA is located in our University of South Carolina College of Journalism with the department head of broadcasting as Executive Manager of the association. Station managers allow few opportunities to pass for reminding us how quickly outdated our qualifications to teach broadcasting courses would become without our continuous relationship with the goings-on in radio and TV stations. Perhaps that's why students tend to find deejays, peedees, newsmen salesmen, and managers as guest lecturers more relevant and valuable than us with all our vaunted credentials.

Maybe, then, we ought not to feel inclined to react totally negatively to the charge of "existing in some radio vacuum tube that blew out years ago."

Admittedly the charge needs to be reduced to something less than an equivalent to grand larceny, nor even petty larceny, but to some form of misrepresentation, nonetheless, if we cannot supply evidence of recent acquaintance with the internal status of broadcast operations in our communities. Need one dare suggest the danger of assuming that there is such a thing as a "typical" radio or TV operation? Need one dare suggest further the futility of attempting to keep up with the professional field by exclusively or predominantly relying on reading religiously the various publications for and about broadcasting and broadcasters? So, if just keeping up with equipment and techniques is all that difficult, little wonder then the swing in broadcast education to humanism and the liberal arts.

Exhibit A in the brief countering the claims of this position is the keynote speech of one of the most respected former professionals and professors in broadcasting given at the 1971 convention of the BEA in Chicago. Few will doubt the competence of Charles Siepmann to testify here. Siepmann charged broadcast education to be little more than an enlistment and training of young people for the media dedicated first, last, always and above all to the almighty dollar with society the loser. The convention responded with a standing ovation. The writer timidly challenged this relegating us all to something worse than uselessness with the question: "Doesn't an education at least 75% in the liberal arts and 25% professional training in broadcasting produce the kind of entrant you seem to look for to bring about an eventual turnabout of the media for the benefit of society?" His answer implied that the media as they are now structured and oriented were beyond such salvation. In short, Dr. Siepmann was telling us that broadcasting education was not only an exercise in futility. It was a novitiate for licensed prostitution.

No doubt, a damaging case can be built against the products -- both graduates and their programming -- of our broadcasting curricula. No more persuasive

evidence can be advanced, in the writer's thinking, than examples such as these gleaned from the UPI and AP radio wires. "Food prices jumped 14.5 per cent in each of the past two years . . . Consumers may see food prices go up only 4 to 5 per cent in 1976."[5] (Find your wallet consoled by that "only" in that sentence?) Or try this as a revelation of broadcast-writer humaneness: "The Zodiac has boasted of killing 13 persons, but police have positively linked the killer to only five murders."[6] Finally, this prize deserving indication of human sensitivity of one of our products writing for Newsweek: "Last Labor Day weekend . . . up to 725 auto deaths were predicted, but only 612 persons actually died."[7] Lest one assume these merely occasional instances of gross callousness, a count of the number of editorial-slanting "onlys" heard on radio and TV will produce shock before loss of count.

Isn't such usage an indictment of our Journalism and Broadcast curricula for their failure to inculcate sensitivity to values -- human suffering, property, monetary, and even life? Moreover, isn't Siepmann valid in scoring the rapidity with which our students leap into the rat race toward success in broadcasting eyes opened simply to what will produce advancement and economic rewards most quickly and closed to humanitarian responsibilities and obligations?

Tiemens supplies his prescription for a cure: "Our objectives should be to educate each student to maximum potential (for making) intelligent decisions in using the media to promote a free, harmonious and democratic society."[8]

Now, if the jury were presented with no more evidence than this, the case for the humanities and liberal arts as the exclusive preparation for the broadcasting profession would be verily irrefutable. But, it is the brief here that, regardless of how devastating a bill one can draw up against broadcasting courses, practical realities in the real world must motivate recess of the court before assuming a just verdict has been reached.

Tiemans specifies how to implement his ideal: "It is not a question of whether mass communications programs should teach skills or theory. It is a question of what constitutes a proper mix of skill-oriented courses and theory-oriented courses."[9]

Motion supported! With reservations about what is meant by "theory". And, is it enough to look at the "mass audience to study the communication processes within that context"?

Introduced into evidence is the philosophy of the American Council on Education for Journalism which "requires the broadest kind of knowledge and experience . . . ACEJ accrediting standards recommend that only about one-fourth of your college work should be in professional journalism and those courses should be concentrated in the last two years of a four-year program . . . The liberal education will provide the base for your professional education in journalism . . . You may agree that the combination of professional and liberal arts and sciences is superior to a straight liberal arts program. It has been a common experience that students with a professional education in journalism not only start with a distinct advantage over students without that specialized training, they stay well ahead of them."[10]

Change the word "Journalism" to "broadcasting education" and the thesis remains equally valid. Besides, just as Journalism and journalism education had to go through a "green eye shade stage", so too apparently must broadcasting. But the time for attaining maturity is long overdue.

The crux of the case rests in the term "professionalism," in its original definition. Included is the fact that one's entry into a profession is normally via a college degree. Subsumed also is recognition that implied is an area of humane activity involving a self-imposed and self-regulated code of ethics governing what is considered by the total membership as morally acceptable practice not to be

circumvented for whatever motive. In addition, professional used to mean "based on sound principles from fields of knowledge basic to the field."

Broadcasting derives its principles from, (besides, ethics and literature), rhetoric, interpretation, semantics, theater, aesthetics, and the psychologies of attention, interest, motivation, and audiences. These areas are, at least, central.

A major need for achieving a professional education in broadcasting based on a solid liberal arts foundation is a whole series of new textbooks akin to classic texts in film, theater and public address, which reflect a basic-principles outlook. Examples? Bettinger's misnamed Television Techniques, (now out of print); Zettl's Sight, Sound and Motion; Lewis' TV Director-Interpreter; Bretz and Stasheff's Television Program; chapter two of Hyde's TV and Radio Announcing. (Forestall the objections of "plugola" and "payola"! The writer "under oath" pleads innocent.)

Obviously, no profession can survive, much less progress, without continual expansion and validation of the frontiers of its knowledge and techniques via experimentation, research, and cross-checking by its practitioners and theorists.

Therefore, a second important requirement is a continuous influx of broadcasters of lengthy experience and respectable attainment into our graduate schools in pursuit of the doctorate qualifying them to be professional broadcast educators. Only by securing the academic credentials of a genuine professional can the many current noteworthy practitioners appealing at our portals for teaching positions avoid having merely technical expertise, no matter how impressive, to offer. In turn, graduate-degree granting institutions may have to raise the age limits currently barring admission to more mature candidates. Admirable the motive may be in other fields to favor the younger applicant for the doctorate so that society may profit from his degree for the maximum number of years possible. However, in

broadcasting, the perspective of years of direct experience combined with the doctorate proves -- as in other professions in which the public is patient, client, consumer or audience -- the most nearly desirable composite of qualifications comprising the truly professional educator.

In summation, a few facts gleaned from NAB conventions and a 26-year contemporaneous career to date in broadcasting and broadcasting education need be cited. Broadcast managements -- whether commercial or non-commercial -- tend to consider their prime responsibilities to be to their sources of financial support. While pressures appear much greater on commercial broadcasters, no managements are exempt from the need to fulfill their obligations toward their funders, the FCC and the public.

These pressures on the broadcasters, in turn, redound upon us to help managements to realize their obligations and inescapable goals. Harold Niven's latest survey shows us graduating some 2½ times as many broadcast majors as U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics figures show the industry can absorb annually through the rest of the seventies. Almost 18,000 students in their junior and senior years of college are listed as broadcast majors while some 3,800 jobs open up each year.[11] Thus, broadcasting programs that fail to equip their students with professional training will find their graduates losing out on the job market to schools turning out mere technicians and operators.

Secondly, the FCC is exerting heavy pressure on broadcasters to improve their equal-employment-opportunity records. That pressure is not only to hire on the lowest levels but to place minority and women graduates in upper level ranks. Broadcasters are looking to us for such students, ready not only to step into an entry position but with the professional training that will enable their promotion to creative and supervisory positions. Hence, graduates without professional education will be literally "short-changed."

Thirdly, witness Thomas Aquinas: "Nemo dat quod non habet." "No one gives what he does not have." Self-evident enough! But are we facing up to the implications of that truism for us? Witness George Bernard Shaw: "Those who can, do. Those who can't, teach. Those who can't teach, criticize."

Hence, the wisdom of the ages, despite scientistic objections to the contrary, attests to the need for students to enter the broadcasting industry with some marketable skill if they are to find ready entree into it.

Moreover, a student lacking qualifications for an entry occupation will not find opportunity available in an already overcrowded market to exercise academic acumen and abilities which generally find expression in higher level positions of creativity and decision-making.

Not sustainable is the objection that a sizable number of broadcasters in a factorial investigation preferred liberal arts trained graduates to broadcast-trained graduates.[12] Weiser provides contradictory testimony. His survey of managers of the state of Ohio discovered that their "primary concern is with meeting the immediate needs of (their) operation, and (they) look for people to meet those needs."[13] Furthermore, broadcasters, like politicians, are not above saying what they think the pollster and their constituents want to hear. Managements' more firmly held attitude is expressed in their first question to applicants: "What experience and training do you have?"

Liberal arts courses are frosting on the cake, the dazzling gift wrap which makes a proferred product more attractive but not appetizing enough without the professional (and not merely technical) qualities deemed indispensable.

Without professionalism, the work of broadcast education grads is like that of instrumentalists and not musicians. The notes are all there but the music isn't.

The prosecution rests. The verdict is yours!

FOOTNOTES

[1]Maurice F. Shelby, Jr., "Television and Radio as Social and Behavioral Sciences: A Revolution?," Educational Broadcasting Review, VII, 1 (February, 1973).

[2]Robert K. Avery, "Where We've Been and Where We're Going (or need to go) in Broadcast Education," Public Telecommunications Review, III, 4, (July/August 1975), p. 34.

[3]ibid.

[4]Ben H. Bagdikian, The Information Machines, New York: Harper Colophon, 1971, pp. xxiii-xxix.

[5]Associated Press, Washington, D.C., (November 6, 1975).

[6]United Press International, Napa, Cal., (March 7, 1971).

[7]Newsweek, (September 7, 1970), p. 54.

[8]Robert K. Tiemens, "The Battle for the Broadcasting Curriculum," Western Speech Communication, XXXVII, 3, (Summer, 1975), p. 187.

[9]ibid.

[10]American Council on Education for Journalism, Education for a Journalism Career, Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri College of Journalism, 1975, p. 3.

[11]Harold Niven, The Fourteenth Report on Broadcast Programs in American Colleges and Universities; 1974-75, Washington, D.C.: National Association of Broadcasters, 1975, p. 1.

[12]Richard Haynes and Singer Buchanan, "A Factorial Investigation of the Underlying Structure of a 'Philosophy of Broadcast Education' and 'Philosophy of a Beginning TV Course' as Viewed by Educators and Commercial Broadcasters." Paper presented at the annual BEA Convention, Las Vegas, April, 1975.

[13]John K. Weiser, "Radio/TV Programs: A Broadcaster's View: A Pilot Study," Paper presented at the annual NAEB Convention, Washington, D.C., November, 1975, p. 10.